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## Moving to Secondary School for Children with ASN

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# **Moving to Secondary School for Children with ASN: a systematic review of international literature**

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## **Key Words**

Additional support needs; special educational needs; Scotland; transition; transfer; primary school; secondary school.

## **Abstract**

This paper presents the findings, from a systematic review of international literature, of the existing research into the transition to secondary school of children with additional support needs (ASN), which happens for most children at around 11 – 12 years of age in Scotland. It brings an original contribution to the existing literature through its focus on the holistic transition experience of this group of children.

From an initial 52 texts that met the inclusion criteria, further scrutiny led to the identification of only 22 empirical studies published in the last 15 years which contained findings meeting the review objectives. Transition is an ongoing process however only five studies were longitudinal. There remains a paucity of international literature to inform good practice in a consistent manner, and a need for further longitudinal, qualitative research to support the development of inclusive education internationally. Implications for educational policy include personalisation of this school move.

## **Introduction**

The current paper focuses on the transitions of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) as they move from primary to secondary school. This term is primarily used in Scotland instead of 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN). As there is a different philosophical approach in Scotland to meeting the needs of children with ASNs, as well as legislative distinctions, the need for the current study arose as no existing literature reviews focusing on the transitions of children with ASN were identified in the current review. Additionally, Hughes, Banks & Terras (2013) comment on the 'dearth of literature' (p.31) and research into the educational transitions of children with SEN. The

focus on the Scottish context is of importance to the author of the current paper as she is a researcher in Scotland, with an interest in educational transitions, as well as having taught children with ASNs.

The current literature review aimed to identify and critique the existing international literature relating to primary – secondary school transitions of children, focusing on ASN. It also aimed to identify good practice and consider where there were gaps in the current literature, making recommendations for future research, educational policy and practice. This was achieved through undertaking a systematic literature review which adopted the principles of the EPPI-Centre (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre) approach (Davies *et al.*, 2013). This approach was chosen due to its seven-step model and peer review aspect which ensures rigour in the process.

Most children are aged around 11 – 12 years when they move to secondary school, although in some countries such as America, and some counties in England where there are middle schools, this move may happen up to the age of around 14 years old (Symonds & Galton, 2014). The current study will use the term ‘transition’, encompassing the terms ‘transfer’ and ‘move’, to describe this (Symonds & Galton, 2014; Topping, 2011, and Uvaas & McKevitt, 2013). The conceptualisation of transition is not often discussed in the literature, although some authors including Hanewald (2013) and Maras & Aveling (2006) view the transition to secondary school as a big change or milestone. For other authors including Davis, Ravenscroft & Bizas (2015), Jindal-Snape & Hannah (2014) and Jindal-Snape & Miller (2008), transition is an ongoing process throughout life, sometimes small and insignificant, at other times more significant such as the transition to secondary school for vulnerable children who may require support with the social and personal aspects of transition. Jindal-Snape & Miller suggest that for all children this may be viewed as a ‘challenge of living’ (p.218). Most children including those with ASN look forward to this life event, viewing it positively and see it as part of growing up, with excitement and anticipation (Jindal-Snape, 2016 and McLellan & Galton, 2015).

The author of the current review, undertaken as part of a larger literature review in preparation for a longitudinal study, has identified a small but important body of literature focusing on the transition to secondary school of children with ASN. Bloyce & Frederickson (2012) and West,

Sweeting & Young (2010) argue that there is a gap in the literature regarding those children for whom the move to secondary school can be a vulnerable time. Bloyce & Frederickson also comment that the existing literature often fails to focus on the process of transition, focusing instead on either the experience of transition or its effect on children's outcomes, the author of the current review also having found this. Peters & Brooks (2016) also comment on the lack of existing research into the educational transitions for children with ASN. The existing literature includes research based in mainstream and specialist settings, and the current review aims to provide recommendations for practice that are appropriate for children moving between mainstream settings, also for those moving between mainstream and specialist settings.

### **Definition of Additional Support Needs**

In Scotland, the term 'additional support needs' (ASN) relates to children and young people who have needs that adversely impact on their ability to access education in some respect and therefore their life chances are at risk of less successful outcomes. A distinctive feature is the way in which philosophy underpins meeting the needs of all children, with a recognition that additional support needs are any barrier to learning that a child may experience (Jindal-Snape, 2016; Scottish Government, 2009). This term was introduced into Scottish legislation in 2004 and was concurrent with a move towards a social model of inclusion across society and the changing provision of education. This includes those with disabilities, those who are eligible for free school meals, and those for whom English is not their first language. Children who are in the care of the Local Authority or who are 'at risk' are also considered to have an ASN. In England and Wales, conversely, the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) has traditionally been used in the literature to describe this group of children and young people. This is defined as having 'a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made' (Department for Education, 2015, p.15) and as such limits the scope of support that may be recognised to those needs which, are long-term, as there is the requirement for an identified learning difficulty or disability to be present. Prior (2013), who draws on the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) in stating that children who have 'twice exceptionality', that is, giftedness and a co-existing disability, should be included within this population, also aligns with the wider Scottish conceptualisation of ASN, which recognises giftedness as a separate ASN.

## Methodology

### *Systematic review of existing literature*

The systematic review of literature was undertaken following the principles of the EPPI-Centre (Davies *et al.*, 2013) approach. A systematic approach was favoured as this reduced the likelihood of repeating previous searches and duplicating work (Jindal-Snape, University of Dundee, Dundee, unpublished) and the avoidance of reliance on ‘serendipity’ (Newby, 2014, p.202). The EPPI-centre approach was chosen as it would allow the identification of reliable sources of evidence from the body of literature available through following seven steps (Davies *et al.*):

1. Scoping the review and developing inclusion criteria.
2. Searching for studies.
3. Screening studies against the inclusion criteria.
4. Mapping the relevant studies to the research question.
5. Appraisal of studies to ensure quality; assessing the weight of evidence found in the studies.
6. Synthesising the study findings.
7. Forming conclusions and recommendations (p.82).

In Step 1, an international body of literature written in English and dating from 2002 to the present day was identified, these being the first inclusion criteria for the review. The cut-off date was chosen as Hargreaves & Galton (2002) had published their large-scale study (‘the ORACLE replication study’) which followed up research undertaken 20 years earlier in England into the primary to secondary school transition. The third inclusion criterion was that studies were to focus on transitions within the age range of 10 – 14 years. Including the wider age range ensured that countries where middle schools operate, such as the USA and some counties in England, were not excluded. Medical papers were excluded from the literature search as the focus of the research was to be on the general transition experiences of children moving to secondary school with ASN. When the initial search was repeated with the focus on additional support needs, studies relating to children with additional support needs or disabilities were also added.

In Step 2, an initial search (Stage 1) using the key words ‘transition’, ‘transfer’ or ‘move’ combined with ‘primary school’, ‘secondary school’ or ‘middle school’, with database searches being

undertaken using ProQuest, Web of Science and educational databases in EBSCO, identified 39 texts with a focus on ASN which were of relevance to the current paper. A further literature search (Stage 2) was then undertaken to identify additional literature focusing on the primary to secondary school transition experiences of children with ASN, using the same databases. Additional key words relating to ASN: ‘learning disabilities’, ‘intellectual disabilities’, mental retardation’, ‘learning difficulties’ or ‘special needs’ were combined with ‘primary school transition’, ‘secondary school transition’, ‘school transition’ or ‘life changes’ (see Table 1). These key words were chosen following consultation of key words used in the articles identified in Stage 1, however it is acknowledged that as key words such as ‘special educational needs’ were not used then not all of the relevant literature may have been identified. This second search, along with the manual searches of the Contents pages of relevant journals and personal recommendations, generated a further 13 relevant articles which were considered.

In Step 3, where studies were screened against the inclusion criteria, a total of 52 texts, including books and grey literature, were identified as being relevant to the current topic. Of these, two literature reviews and 22 peer reviewed empirical studies met the inclusion criteria fully and are discussed in this paper. As there was one research question for the current review, Step 4 was completed through papers meeting the inclusion criteria fully.

#### *Existing Literature Reviews*

Two literature reviews which focused on the transition to secondary school for children with ASN were identified (Hughes *et al.*, 2013 and Prior, 2013). While these are both literature-based, only Hughes *et al.* state that they carried out a systematic literature review. Both focus on one specific aspect of the transition to secondary school, with Hughes *et al.* using the perspective of children’s psychosocial development to consider the impact of transition on this, and Prior focusing on children with ‘twice exceptionality’ as defined above. The current paper therefore brings originality to the existing body of literature through focusing on the wider population of children with an ASN and the preparation for and process of the transition to secondary school.

#### *Nature of analysis*

For this article, in addition to UK studies, four of which were based in Scotland, articles reporting on four Australian studies, two Irish studies, one American study and a report on a study in the Netherlands were included. In Step 5, the methodologies of the 22 articles which reported on

empirical studies were critiqued by the author and given a rating between 1 (very little methodology present and not possible to replicate the study) and 5 (very detailed methodology which could be replicated easily and globally). A summary of the critique is presented in Table 2. This rating was based on that used by Hughes *et al.* (2013) and adapted to include aspects in the critique such as generalisability to a global context and whether it would be possible to replicate the study in the future. The critique included factors such as the standardised assessments and rating scales used in the studies were considered, as some of these are reserved to occupational groups. For example, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV), which was used by Mandy *et al.* (2016) in their STEP-ASD study, can only be administered in the United Kingdom by certain registrants of the British Psychological Society. Where studies contained reserved assessments, their ratings were correspondingly lower.

In Step 6, the findings from the existing studies were synthesised through consideration of the role of supported transitions for:

- children with any ASN,
- children with mental health needs,
- children with autism.

These latter groupings were chosen due to there being a higher number of existing studies focusing on these ASNs.

## **Findings**

The current review concluded that there is a limited body of literature which focuses on the generalizable good practice to support children with an ASN who are transitioning to secondary school. Of the 22 texts discussed, just under three-quarters (18) focused on specific disabilities or ASN. Where there are studies other than for children with autism, which was the most frequently researched, these are few and mostly small-scale in design. In the context of social, emotional and behavioural needs, the needs of children who may be vulnerable or ‘at risk’, including those who are Looked After Children (LAC), are discussed by Bloyce & Frederickson (2012), Buchanan, Nese & Clark (2016) and Yadav, O’Reilly & Karim (2010). Several papers discuss aspects of mental health including anxiety (Jindal-Snape *et al.*, 2011; Neal *et al.*, 2016; Zeedyk *et al.*, 2003) and self-esteem (Poorthuis *et al.*, 2014).

### *The role of supported transitions for children with ASNs*

For some groups of children, for example those with lower academic attainment or less positive mental health, which could describe some children with ASN, their transition may be predicted to be less straightforward than for their peers. The Australian quantitative studies by Lester, Waters & Cross (2013) and Vaz *et al.* (2014) focused on the children's mental health at the time of transition with Vaz *et al.* suggesting in their study that there is a responsibility on schools, particularly the primary schools, to ensure that supported transitions are put into place for these children. A strength of Lester *et al.*'s study was that the same children were tracked over three time periods, although the data collection methods varied. There were almost 3500 children in their study, although the authors caution that as they came from one specific group of schools then the findings could not be generalised to the whole Australian population and beyond. Vaz *et al.* also identified this limitation and they debated the reliability of the children's self-reporting of their academic competence which was like the concerns expressed in other studies such as Hannah & Topping (2012), and Poorthuis *et al.* (2014), where self-reporting has been used as a data collection tool.

In their study based in Ireland where 58 children participated, including eight with a SEN, Foley, Foley & Curtin (2016) suggest that it may take a 'number of terms or additional supports' (p.2) for children with ASN to settle into school whereas for their peers it may take only around 2 weeks to settle in. This extended settling time may have a negative impact on the children's attainment. They caution, however, that the small cohort of schools in one town participating in the study means that the findings are not generalisable, a limitation also noted by Lester *et al.* in their 2013 study. As the groups of children were different pre and post-transition this was another limitation as ideally the same group of children would have been followed up after their transitions, something also noted by Zeedyk *et al.* (2003).

The literature recognises that heightened anxiety levels can occur for most children and that some degree of anxiety is necessary. Its' role in a child's transition, in that it exists alongside anticipation and excitement, is discussed by Zeedyk *et al.* (2003) and more recently by Foley *et al.* (2016), who suggest that for most children the transition to secondary school is an exciting one. Neal *et al.* (2016) also focused on the anxieties of children at secondary school transition in their longitudinal



study which included 89 children with SEN (from an overall sample of 621 children), although they collected data from parents and teachers rather than from the children. Their study concurs with the earlier view of Maras & Aveling (2006) in that children with SEN sometimes require a different transition programme of support to their peers. They suggest that not doing so may increase the anxiety at this time for some children. While all three are small scale studies and thus cannot be generalisable, there is evidence in the wider primary – secondary school transition literature that most children do look forward to this move. For some children with mental health needs, however, the move to secondary school can be challenging and Lester *et al.* (2013), writing about their Australian research, suggest that there is an important task to be undertaken in ‘fostering both connectedness to school and mental health’ (p.167) both before and after the move to secondary school.

#### *The role of supported transitions for children with mental health needs*

It is recognised in much of the existing literature that the move from primary to secondary school is a vulnerable period for children, whether they have an ASN or not. This can have an impact on the maintenance of a child’s attainment levels and their wellbeing and is discussed specifically in three studies: Dann (2011), Poorthuis *et al.* (2014) and Yadav *et al.* (2010). Two of the studies (Poorthuis *et al.* and Yadav *et al.*) are based on quantitative data and focus on self-esteem, requiring the children to complete rating scales related to their self-esteem. In Yadav *et al.*’s study, parents also completed the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ), providing a comparison to the children’s self-reporting. It could be argued that as Dann’s qualitative study was not focused on a specific aspect of ASN and had a far smaller sample than the two quantitative studies, this was less robust in its findings related to self-esteem, however inter-rater reliability of the data analysis was established to ensure robustness of the interpretation of the data being reported. Both quantitative studies also reported limitations such as the reliability of results and whether a different rating scale may have been more appropriate (Poorthuis *et al.*) and the lack of a control group in Yadav *et al.*’s study. The rise in the number of children with mental health conditions noted in some of the studies and literature reviews suggests that there is an increasing population of children for whom the anxieties related to school transition continue beyond the initial ‘settling-in’ period.

Buchanan *et al.* (2016) discuss their American study which focused on the transition to secondary school of children with emotional, social and behavioural needs. Their qualitative study included children who were moving from a specialist provision into a mainstream school and included parents' and teachers' needs and the support that they sought at this transition time. Again, this was a small sample of 13 parents and 14 teachers and the authors caution against generalising their findings to a wider population. They found that, however, for parents and teachers, transitions were often not supported adequately, and that the child's voice was not heard in the planning for school moves. This was the only study to focus on this ASN and this transition pathway in the systematic literature review.

*The role of supported transitions for children with autism*

For children with autism, the literature, none of which is based on research carried out other than in England or Scotland, concurs that the move from primary to secondary school is one that can be a 'substantial challenge' (Mandy *et al.*, 2015, p.2) and that raised anxiety levels are one characteristic that can present barriers for the child's successful transition and so requires support (Hannah & Topping, 2012; Mandy *et al.*, 2015). Both studies were quantitative and the authors caution against generalisation due to the small sample sizes in each study (Hannah & Topping reporting on data for eight children and Mandy *et al.* reporting on data regarding 28 children). They also reported similar limitations in that not all children participated in all the data collection stages. Despite this, the wider literature about children with ASD also acknowledges the raised anxiety levels as a feature of autism. Dann (2011) describes this as 'a greater intensity of worry and difficulty' (p.305).

Other studies focusing on children with ASD collected qualitative data and again these were small-scale studies with small samples. Some of the authors acknowledged limitations which could have raised questions regarding the validity of their findings, for example Neal & Frederickson (2016) discuss how their questions were biased towards the children having had a positive experience of transition and Tobin *et al.* (2012) questioned whether parents who volunteered for their study did so because of problems that their children were experiencing with the transition. While, as discussed above, many children experience heightened anxieties related to the transition to secondary school, for most this is a short-term phenomenon and reduces or disappears completely within the first few months of being at secondary school (Hannah & Topping, 2012), whereas for

children with autism, their anxiety levels are already heightened as this is a long-term implication of having autism. No international studies were identified in the systematic literature search which focused on the transitions of children with autism moving to secondary school.

## **Discussion**

The discussion of the findings commences with consideration of features of effective transitions for children with ASNs, moving on to consider the challenges of, and barriers to, these; before considering supported transitions for children with mental health needs, then children with autism. Finally, the role of educators in supporting primary – secondary school transition for children with ASNs will be discussed.

### *Features of effective transitions for children with ASNs*

Much of the literature agrees that supported and enhanced transitions are of benefit for children with ASN but that the supports that could be put into place were sometimes discussed but not implemented. There is a need for recognition that transition may be an ASN for some children, or it may heighten an existing ASN for a child, leading to increased vulnerability. Supported transitions, therefore, are essential for children with ASNs, with some requiring an enhanced transition programme over and above that offered to all children making the transition. Davis *et al.* (2015) advocate the conceptualisation that transition planning should follow a ‘child-centred model’ (p.37). They state that effective transitions should include six characteristics, these being participation, partnership, strong planning, trust, clear communication and finally, co-operation which needs to include the structures to enable this. Bloyce & Frederickson (2012), Maras & Aveling (2006) and Tobin *et al.* (2012) concur with Davis *et al.* Furthermore, Bloyce & Frederickson found from their implementation of a short transition support programme with children who had an ASN and were identified as being ‘vulnerable’ due to either this or due to their being less fluent in English, that the programme led to children having reduced anxieties (these reduced to the levels experienced by most children making the move to secondary school) and also that the children continued to show improvements after they had made the move to their new school. Their study focused on emotional and social aspects of transition and the authors reflected on whether limitations of the study may have been that children who already had heightened anxieties and worries about their transitions were more likely to be selected, also that there was the potential for children to exhibit ‘response-shift bias’ (p.15) when they completed the

self-reporting rating scales after they had received the intervention. Nevertheless, their study suggests that the recognition by professionals that some children may be at increased risk of vulnerability at transition, and providing screening to identify them, thus enabling targeted support to be provided, would be a positive step towards ensuring effective transition experiences for all children.

#### *Overcoming the challenges of transitions for children with ASNs*

Foley *et al.* (2016) found in their research that for children with additional needs, their transition may be more prone to obstacles and challenges than for their peers. They suggest that children within this population may have increased anxiety and be more susceptible to bullying and be, generally, more vulnerable. The key challenges and barriers to a successful transition identified by the authors included bullying, lack of time for planning and collaboration by professionals, a lack of training to support understanding of a child's ASN and how to support them, teacher attitudes, and the time taken for children to adjust to the new school, although these challenges were mostly short-term. They recommend that schools should have a 'greater emphasis on transitions involving those with SEN' (p.1) for these reasons. Foley *et al.* also commented on the extended time taken for some children with ASN to settle into their new schools, and the author of the current study believes that there is a need for educators to become aware of the children for whom this is most likely so that personalised transition planning can take this into account and include strategies to mitigate for the predicted dip in a child's attainment.

Neal *et al.* (2016) assert that for children with additional needs 'an individualised approach, tailored to children's specific needs' (p. 42) to transition planning may be of benefit. They consider that transition planning should include hearing the child's voice, citing the English Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015) which places importance on this. This person-centred approach is something that is promoted through national policy such as Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) in Scotland and the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and, for children with more complex needs, Education, Health and Care plans in England. This approach is also advocated by Strnadova & Cumming (2014) in their Australian research looking at students with developmental disabilities moving between primary and secondary school, which they recommend should be guided by evidence-based practice (p.318). In addition to providing a personalised, targeted transition intervention to support children with ASNs, a sense of school

belongingness and connectedness to the new setting should be encouraged, as discussed by Lester *et al.* (2013) who suggest that increased school belongingness can have a positive impact on a child's mental health and wellbeing.

#### *The role of supported transitions for children with mental health needs*

Yadav *et al.* (2010) suggest that short-term, personalised support can have a positive impact on both the child's attainment and their self-confidence, with changes persisting through the transition. They comment that the 'disruption' to self-esteem may be temporary and due primarily to the move to secondary school, cautioning against generalisation due to their small sample size, and recommend that mentoring programmes should be implemented alongside other transition activities and programmes. The question of whether a child's self-esteem is adversely affected by the move to secondary is not answered conclusively in the existing literature (Poorthuis *et al.*, 2014), the authors commenting that the extent to which a child's self-esteem is affected is, in their study, dependent on how positive the actual move is for them. It should, however, be acknowledged that some anxiety can be positive, as discussed earlier in the paper, and so perhaps the focus should be on enabling children to manage their anxieties positively and proactively, through an intervention to support the development of self-efficacy in this area of the child's health and wellbeing.

#### *The role of supported transitions for children with autism*

Dann (2011) and Hannah & Topping (2012) agree that children with autism may benefit from more preparation, with suggestions including orientation visits and support to become familiar with the timetable, being made. Hannah & Topping also suggest that teaching relaxation and anxiety management strategies may be of benefit. Mandy *et al.* (2016) also remark that there is an increased risk of bullying and academic under-achievement for children with autism. They comment that there is an urgency for schools to become more accommodating of children with additional needs and, for their study, particularly those with autism. Their paper discusses the standardised intervention, STEP-ASD, which is a low-intensity intervention to support children with autism and to reduce the frequency of distress and challenging behaviours as the children move to secondary school. The authors found that the intervention was most effective when a

range of professionals could support its implementation, rather than it being only teachers who already had a heavy workload, an important consideration in multi-agency working.

#### *The role of educators in transition*

Dann's (2011) research findings also suggest that encounters with staff are an important factor in ensuring a successful transition, with the children in her study having commented that 'kind' and 'understanding' staff were preferred, along with a need for training in autism awareness which was suggested by both parents and staff. This suggests that there is a need for staff to receive training and awareness raising to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the ASN that children coming into their care may have (Hopwood, Hay & Dymment, 2016; Tobin *et al.*, 2012) with Hopwood *et al.* also suggesting in their Australian study that teachers require support in order that they can support children adequately. The author of the current review believes that training should include a focus on raising awareness of the wider ASNs that children may experience, including low self-esteem and poverty, and the impact that these can have for a child as they transition to secondary school. Peters & Brooks (2016) and Scanlon *et al.* (2015) suggest that, additionally, teachers should understand the experiences that the children's parents have had, this knowledge being key in enabling professionals to know what activities may be participated in successfully and those activities that would be less well-suited. This suggests, therefore, that there also a need to support the team around the child both emotionally and practically, through providing training and support for educators and families so that they can best support the child's transition.

#### *Limitations of the study*

There are limitations in the current study which must be acknowledged. Some articles were possibly missed in the literature search as the inclusion criteria was limited to publications focusing on educational transition to secondary school. Another limitation was the range of key words as increasing the multiplicity of these, or including phrases such as 'special educational needs' or 'additional support needs', may have identified further papers, as may including specific disabilities in the key words. Although there was a systematic approach taken, using the principles of the EPPI-Centre model, some of the articles included were focused on an aspect of the children's transition rather than on the actual transition experience itself. Were the review to be replicated in

the future, an improvement could be to make all included articles focused on the transition experience itself.

A limitation of the methodology is that only the author carried out the critique of the empirical literature in Step 5. A greater rate of reliability in the critique may have been gained from another researcher conducting the critique concurrently, with inter-rater reliability being checked for accuracy and consistency.

Some limitations found in the empirical literature reviewed are common to several of the studies, for example several samples are reported as lacking diversity or only representing children being educated in the state sector, therefore the findings may not be consistent with children's experiences from other backgrounds. Most studies were based on small samples and there had been restricted recruitment, for example from one Australian state. Another limitation of some studies was that they had a specific focus on one aspect of transition, for example the use of drama to alleviate anxiety (Jindal-Snape *et al.*, 2011). Challenges were also identified in the data collection for some studies and this was around the children's self-reporting via rating scales such as the SDQ with Bloyce & Frederickson (2012) and Vaz *et al.* (2014) commenting on concerns regarding the reliability of these measures. Vaz *et al.* also commented on the potential for parents to over-emphasise the external conduct features in the case of teenagers when completing the SDQ. There were very few longitudinal studies and four of these were based on quantitative data. Two of the longitudinal studies did not have the same children in all stages, with this also being found in several of the shorter studies which collected data pre and post-transition.

## **Conclusion**

This review has found that there is a small body of literature which focuses on the move between primary and secondary school for children who have an ASN. While this reports on international research, the paucity of literature means that it is not yet possible to identify where good practice is happening internationally in a consistent manner. Much of the literature focuses on children moving within mainstream and there is little which focuses on moves within, or to or from, specialist provision at this age.

### **Recommendations for policy and practice**

Good practice recommendations from the existing literature are broadly in agreement that for children with ASN, supported and enhanced transitions are beneficial with Neal *et al.* (2016) suggesting that these should be personalised and tailored to the child's needs. Wherever possible, good practice happening in schools should be shared and celebrated through the research findings. When considering policy change, Hanewald (2013), Hughes *et al.* (2013) and Topping (2011) all state that staff working with children who have ASN should have knowledge and understanding of the ASN that children coming into their care may have. The author of the current review suggests that this should include establishing an understanding of the conceptualisation of ASN in the wider context of any barrier to a child's learning. This suggests, therefore, a need for access to continuous professional development for professionals throughout their careers to ensure that their practice is research-informed, although it is acknowledged that professionals cannot be experts in all ASNs and therefore access to specialist teachers and allied professionals who are experts in their field is essential, and should continue, or be established where this is not the case already. A policy change may be that all professionals working with children who have ASN engage in relevant career-long professional learning, and that qualifying programmes continue to include inputs on meeting the needs of children who have an ASN. To address the needs of children for whom transitions are a period of increased vulnerability, screening should be considered so that these children may be identified, and targeted support provided.

### **Recommendations for future research**

There is a need for further qualitative, longitudinal research to identify and share international good practice around the transitions of children with a wide range of ASNs. This is particularly important for children where specific transition support related to their ASN is of benefit, as the current study has identified very few medical diagnoses where there are multiple empirical studies internationally. Cross-cultural research should also be undertaken, as a limitation of several studies was that they were undertaken within one geographical area. The research should focus on the positive aspects of transitions, particularly where the transition involves specialist provision, and regarding identifying and disseminating good transition practice to a wider audience. To support the recommendation for screening to take place so that children at risk of increased vulnerability can be identified and support put into place, a screening tool should be developed which reflects the conceptualisation of ASN as being any barrier to learning. Future research



should also consider the experiences of the ‘team around the child’ as they make the transition to secondary school, considering their needs and the support that they require as they support children and their families in this school move.

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Table 1: Key Word combinations in literature search with ASN focus

<u>Key Word</u>	<u>AND</u>	<u>OR</u>
<u>Stage 1</u>		
Learning disabilities	Primary school transition	Secondary school transition
Intellectual disabilities	Primary school transition	Secondary school transition
Mental retardation	Primary school transition	Secondary school transition
Learning difficulties	Primary school transition	Secondary school transition
Special needs	Primary school transition	Secondary school transition
<u>Stage 2</u>		
Learning disabilities	School transition	Life changes
Intellectual disabilities	School transition	Life changes
Mental retardation	School transition	Life changes
Learning difficulties	School transition	Life changes
Special needs	School transition	Life changes

Table 2 Summary of critique of relevant articles

<u>Rating Key</u> 5 = Very detailed methodology, can be replicated easily and globally 4 = Detailed methodology but some queries, can be replicated in the same country 3 = Some detail in methodology, challenging to replicate without seeking clarification, restricted assessments used 2 = Little detail in methodology, not possible to replicate 1 = No methodology present, not possible to replicate	<u>Standardised Assessments Key</u> ADOS = Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scales RCMAS = Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale SCDC = Social and Communication Disorders Checklist SCQ = School Concerns Questionnaire SDQ = Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire SPPA = Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents SPVS = Schwartz Peer Victimization Scale VABS – II Vineland Adaptive Behavioural Scales 2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition WISC = Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
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<u>Author and date</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Sample / Country / Specified ASN</u>	<u>Methodology</u>	<u>Main Findings</u>
Bloyce & Frederickson 2012	3	457 children England Vulnerable	Quantitative data SCQ SDQ	Positive impact on levels of school concerns, importance of differentiated monitoring of intervention outcomes.
Buchanan <i>et al.</i> 2016	3	13 parents 14 teachers America SEBD	Qualitative data Focus groups	Home and school need to work in partnership, parents need support too, positive reinforcement and frequent practice vital for social skills development.
Dann 2011	4	6 pupils 6 parents 18 professionals England ASD	Qualitative data Child interviews Parent interviews Professionals focus groups	Home /school liaison and communication is key. Staff need to be trained. Overwhelming positivity of all involved in transition.
Foley <i>et al.</i> 2016	2	58 children (8 SEN) Ireland	Qualitative and Quantitative data Focus group Interview Survey	SEN students have increased anxiety, more prone to bullying and more vulnerable than peers.

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				Greater emphasis needed for SEN transitions due to increased vulnerability.
Hannah & Topping 2012	3	8 children Scotland ASD	Quantitative data RCMAS Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (adapted)	Individual differences are a significant feature. Mixed picture of anxiety from results.
Hopwood <i>et al.</i> 2016	2	12 teachers Australia	Qualitative data Interviews	Communication between primary / secondary schools needed, adequate teacher support, continuity of curriculum all needed.
Jindal-Snape <i>et al.</i> 2011	3	357 children 12 teachers 4 professionals Scotland Anxiety	Qualitative data Child and teacher surveys and interviews Professionals interviews and focus groups	Creative drama can be used effectively, it empowers pupils, assists with emotional understanding and a space to rehearse real life transitions.
Lester <i>et al.</i> 2013	3	3459 students Australia Mental health	Longitudinal Quantitative data DASS School connectedness scale Survey	Increased connectedness to school associated with decreased depression and anxiety. A need to intervene during transition period to improve social and mental health outcomes.
Mandy <i>et al.</i> 2016	3	37 children (20 control) England ASD	Quantitative data SCDC, SDQ, WISC, Teacher interviews	Children receiving the transition intervention had large reduction in SEBD difficulties at school. Intervention has value for reducing problem behaviours and distress in children with ASD.
Mandy <i>et al.</i> 2015	3	28 children (adults completing measures) England ASD	Longitudinal Quantitative data ADOS, Beck Youth Inventories, SDQ, SPVS, VABS-II, WISC	No evidence for marked escalation of difficulties during transition, nor decrease. Parental reports of bullying levels falling when moved to secondary

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				school compared with at primary school.
Maras & Aveling 2006	5	6 children with parent or teacher England	Qualitative data Case study Interviews	Continuity of support is beneficial. Effective communication between all parties and individualised support is of benefit.
Neal & Frederickson 2016	4	6 children England ASD	Qualitative data Interviews	Children favoured positive interventions and practical advice. Benefits from individualised support. Child's voice needs to be incorporated into transition plans.
Neal <i>et al.</i> 2016	4	532 typically developing children, 89 children with SEN 9 teachers England Anxiety	Longitudinal Quantitative data Surveys with parents and teachers	General transition strategies, e.g. bridging units of work, led to higher school anxiety in children with SEN. Children with SEN need a personalised approach.
Peters & Brooks 2016	3	17 parents England Asperger Syndrome	Qualitative and Quantitative data Survey	Personalised transition needed. Pre-transition preparation as well as ongoing support throughout secondary school needed.
Poorthuis <i>et al.</i> 2014	2	306 children Netherlands Self-esteem	Longitudinal Quantitative data Rating scales	Disappointing levels of actual social acceptance compared with anticipated SA lead to reduced self-esteem, especially for children with already fragile self-esteem / neuroticism.
Scanlon <i>et al.</i> 2015	2	32 children 42 parents Ireland	Qualitative and Quantitative data Focus groups Surveys	Worrying about 'fitting in' seemed unique to children with SEN. Other worries and concerns similar to international literature.
Strnadova & Cumming 2014	3	Teachers from 75 schools Australia	Qualitative and Quantitative data Surveys	Mandated, student-centred planning and support is needed. Only some of



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				best practice is implemented in schools.
Tobin <i>et al.</i> 2012	3	Parents, 7 pre, 4 post transition England ASD	Qualitative data Focus groups	Specific support needed, perception that inclusion focus has impacted on this. Social & emotional support needed for children.
Vaz <i>et al.</i> 2014	4	197 typically developing children, 69 children with disabilities Australia Mental health	Quantitative data SDQ, SPPA, family demographics	Pupils with disability or socially disadvantaged backgrounds tended to have lower academic attainment and mental health functioning. Benefit from support.
West <i>et al.</i> 2010	2	1258 children in all 4 stages 2581 teachers 128 headteachers Scotland Wellbeing and attainment	Longitudinal Qualitative and Quantitative data Rating scales Surveys	Pupils with lower ability / lower self-esteem tended to have less successful school transitions. Lower self-esteem and preparedness led to poorer peer transitions.
Yadav <i>et al.</i> 2010	4	86 children England At risk	Quantitative data B/Gsteem rating scale SDQ	Mentoring-type interventions helpful for pupils with mental health difficulties, positive changes in all measures noted.
Zeedyk <i>et al.</i> 2003	3	<u>Primary school</u> 192 children 119 parents 11 teachers <u>Secondary school</u> 128 children 19 teachers Scotland	Qualitative and Quantitative data Surveys	Common worries similar to those in other countries. Pupil and parent views broadly similar – when improving transitions, need to focus on both groups. Teacher focus on institutional initiatives, not on individual abilities making a difference.